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Approved For Release 2004/07/08 : CIA-RDP80R01731R000900110027-6

February 22, 1954

POST-BERLIN THOUGHTS ON THE
CURRENT SOVIET PSYCHE

NSC REVIEW
COMPLETED,
10/31/04

If Berlin did nothing else, it removed quite a few question marks with respect to Soviet attitudes and policies toward the West.

We went to Berlin wondering if the so-called "New Look" had any sincerity behind it or could lead to any practical negotiated results.

We also wondered if the recent talk about Army ascendancy in the Kremlin was more than a rumor.

The relationship between the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist regime was another big question mark.

Another vast "guess" area was how much the internal agricultural and economic stresses so clearly stated by Krushchev might affect external Soviet policy.

We also wondered whether the death of Stalin had in any way affected the traditional Soviet inflexibility in negotiation, and if the passing of this almost Asian tyrant would permit top Soviet Foreign Office personalities to be more relaxed among themselves and in their relations with "foreigners".

To some of these questions some pretty clear answers emerged during the Berlin Conference. To others, the answers, although not completely clear, may be estimated with considerably more accuracy than before Berlin.

DOCUMENT NO. 27
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☒
IT DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C 2011
NEXT REVIEW DATE: 2011
DATE: 2011 REVIEWER:

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The Soviet Delegation was unquestionably their first team. In the front row of the Soviet Delegation were Molotov, Gromyko, Malik, and Zarubin, with Vinogradov and Semenov being frequently consulted in the second row, and Sobolev, head of the Foreign Office North American Desk, always present.

The atmosphere between themselves seemed to be quite relaxed. The passing of notes and the whispered advice during the conferences was spontaneous and the advisers volunteered information and advice to Molotov just as easily as he turned to consult them.

Gromyko, who incidentally looked like death taking a holiday, was unquestionably the chief consultant-adviser, and frequently showed considerably less deference toward Molotov than, for instance, Frank Roberts toward Eden, or the top French toward Bidault.

During the social gatherings, whether in the Soviet Embassy or when we were hosts, the Soviet mood was one of great personal friendliness, sometimes verging on an almost pathetic eagerness to be liked personally even though professionally the gap between us was as great as ever.

Molotov, with Troianovsky at his side, was by far the most entertaining member of the Soviet group. Compared to the others, his humor was sharp, subtle, and fast, and he seemed to derive genuine pleasure from being able to throw the switch and have verbal fun.

On the other hand, none of the Russians ever really forgot the party line, and if they found themselves on the edge of any kind of personal

admission, the party line reappeared very fast -- in Molotov's case with an occasional twinkle; in the case of the others, with heavy-footed solemnity.

Anthony Nutting of the British Delegation reported that during one of his conversations with the Soviet Chinese expert, he was urging the Soviets to have the Chinese Communists relax their impossible attitude and regulations against British businessmen in China, who were being held as virtual prisoners because of the financial demands made upon them. Nutting reported that his Soviet vis-a-vis appeared about to say the equivalent of "Well, I'll see what I can do about it", when all of a sudden his face changed, he drew himself up, and said, "If you would accept the Chinese People's Republic as a member of the Big Five, such matters could be more easily handled".

This policy of personal friendliness within a framework of unremittingly tough foreign policy, is about the only visible evidence of the hoped-for, or at least puzzled-over, "New Look" in Soviet foreign policy. Nowhere else could any sign of it be found. In fact, the whole Molotov performance in Berlin was, if anything, almost needlessly tough, and actually helped us not only to preserve Western unity, but to further our propaganda out of the mouth of Molotov rather than out of our own.

For instance, Molotov came to Berlin with quite a few potential customers -- to name some of the important ones ... the East Germans,

the West Germans, the German Socialists, Austria, French fears, French neutralists, British public opinion. It would have been a very difficult job to sell all of these customers, but it would not have been too difficult to select a few and sacrifice the rest.

Instead, day after day Molotov made absolutely no effort to sell or even salvage any of these possible customers, and wound up by having all Germans disappointed, if not enraged, with the German Socialists in such a quandary that their leaders didn't know what to do or say, and frequently contradicting themselves in print, with even "Le Monde" squirming in public, with the French so scared of losing NATO that they actually felt better about EDC, with the British by and large behind Eden, with all but the most doctrinaire neutralists on very rockyground, and with Austria, the cheapest sale of all, dumbfounded and desperate.

Furthermore, when Molotov's early attempts to split the French and British away from us on the very touchy Asian and Chinese matter failed, Western solidarity won a tremendous victory, from which Bidault, Eden, and Dulles all derived new strength in their determination to stick together. And toward the end of the Conference, the three Western Ministers hardly needed any signal practice at all in order to complement each other in reply to Soviet tactics.

Admittedly, my flat statement regarding Molotov's having lost all his possible customers is quite an oversimplification. The world press during the period of the Conference was not 100% for us, nor were all

Parliamentarians in Paris, London, Washington, and Bonn uniform in their reactions. There was criticism of what they considered Western intransigence and unwillingness to compromise, but on balance, I believe the oversimplification will stand up. It was interesting to note that some of Molotov's trial balloons on Asia and on the German referendum never took real root, and never held the headlines for more than 24 hours.

This ruthless and total disregard of public opinion and propaganda dividends on Molotov's part could not have been accidental. Soviet expert Bohlen several times said that this was a perfect illustration of the Soviet technique that although the Soviets give more thought to propaganda than anyone else, nevertheless when propaganda and policy come into conflict, propaganda is sacrificed without a second thought. The Molotov behaviour in Berlin certainly confirms the Bohlen thesis.

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What, then, was this overriding policy point which controlled everything?

It was a military point. And whether the Soviet military dictated to the Soviet civilians, or whether the Soviet civilians thought that self-preservation indicated reliance on military considerations is not really important. Whoever thought of it first, the fact remains that military considerations controlled.

This was particularly obvious in the case of the Austrian Peace Treaty.

What was at stake here? Certainly the loss of 7-million easy-going Austrians without overwhelmingly important agriculture or industry could not be considered a major threat to the USSR. Furthermore, although the letter of Treaties with Hungary and Rumania called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from those two countries once peace was concluded with Austria, a simple invitation from the Hungarian and Rumanian puppet regimes to have Soviet troops remain would easily have taken care of that problem.

But Soviet military considerations and the Soviet military equivalent of "J'y suis; j'y reste" apparently dictated the absurdity of the Soviet position with respect to the Austrian Peace Treaty. Not a square inch of occupied or controlled territory was to be given up.

In the case of German unification and German elections, Molotov passed up the fairly easy opportunity to say that he could live with NATO but could not live with EDC. Had he done this, he would undoubtedly have scuttled EDC with the French and the Germans. Instead, he chose the most extreme position that could be taken, namely, that EDC must be abandoned, NATO must be dismantled, the U. S. must become nothing more than an observer in European affairs, and all possible regional defensive alliances must be forbidden.

Here again was an extreme military reaction without regard for political or propaganda consequences, inasmuch as by the statement of that position he got a horse laugh from the Americans, he really scared the French and the British, and he convinced German Socialists and neutralists that compromise on some middle ground was impossible.

Their military men told them that there is no way of appeasing themselves out of their problem -- that if they grant the inch of Austria they will eventually be forced to grant the ell of Eastern Germany and all the European satellites. The flywheel of history can only turn in one direction at a time -- therefore, they should hold on to what they have no matter what the cost in bitterness, seething discontent, and negative world opinion.

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As to Soviet relations with Communist China, when we went to Berlin it was pretty generally agreed that Molotov would have to make a major pitch for the elevation of Communist China to the position of a full-fledged Big Five club member, but some of us felt that he would not carry it beyond the point at which he could say to the Chinese Communists, "I did everything I could for you."

Instead, he carried this proposal to the absolute bitter end. With the single exception of the Austrian Peace Treaty, there was no discussion of any item during the entire month into which Communist China was not injected at some time or other. Molotov even insisted that the Chinese

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Communists should participate in the discussions on the President's atomic pool for peaceful purposes" proposal, and it was not until 6 PM of the last day of the Conference that Molotov finally accepted our language for the final clause of the proposal for the Geneva Conference, which stated that the proposal did not imply recognition of Communist China.

In other words, Molotov's solicitude for the social standing of his ally went well beyond the call of either friendship or expediency. For the first time since the war -- in fact, since 1918 -- the Russian Soviets have to look over their shoulders at 400-million Chinese when they are negotiating with the West, and this may have important implications.

How Peiping will react to Molotov's failure to have them accepted in the club, how they will react to our underscoring that failure in the language of the final clause of the proposal for the Geneva Conference, is not yet known. It is to be doubted, however, that they will be pleased at the lack of performance on the part of their Russian ally, which always advertised itself as almost omnipotent.

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What, then is the composite Soviet picture emerging from Berlin?

It would appear that on the one hand the Soviet leaders are a group of men slowly relaxing in the absence of the whip of the Stalin tyranny -- anxious to be liked as individuals, and eager to give every personal evidence of their desire to be accepted as human beings.

On the other hand, another tyranny is in process of forming, and that is the tyranny of fear that their expansionist conquests will melt away unless they are willing to impose almost absurd conditions for what they call the relaxation of world tensions. Everybody could really relax if the Soviet world extended from Kamchatka to the English Channel, and the U. S. promised to remain within its own continental limits.

Furthermore, these Soviet rulers haven't even begun to chew the China mouthful, let alone swallow it -- but they know they've got something big and tough in their mouths, something that may prove troublesome and something that cannot be ignored.

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And all of this against the backdrop of a very complicated and possibly dangerous internal agricultural and economic situation which has assumed sufficient gravity to force them to reverse the policy of decades and overnight to attempt to placate the peasant and the consumer.

This adds to their extraordinary fear, and is one more reason for no external relaxation. They do not feel that they can appease both inside and outside at the same time.

But here they are in a very real sense prisoners of their own slogans. If khrushchev can say publicly, as he did last fall, that there is less livestock in the USSR today than there was under the Czars, he can afford to say it because some miraculous Soviet Plan will fix everything

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so that in 1954 there will be more livestock in the USSR than there was under the Czars. Similarly, a Plan can convert a factory from machine guns to nylons in a few months.

These things are not going to come about, and 1954 looms as a very important year in the Soviet scheme of things.

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If, during 1954, we have the guts and the skill to maintain constant pressure at all points of the Soviet orbit, we will get dividends from such a policy. Furthermore, our pressure can take the form of much bolder harassment than we have yet felt advisable, the reason being that the chances of Soviet military aggression, at least during 1954, are probably lower than they have been for a long time.

At some time or other during 1954, the combination of external discontent and the fruits of internal unfulfilled appeasement will start working in our favor in a great big way.

If this is true -- and I believe that it is true -- the Berlin Conference will have been the most important and most successful encounter between the East and the West in ten years.